CHAPTER XXVI

RIDING THE WINGED HORSE

To think, and to feel, constitute the two grand divisions of men of genius—the men of reasoning and the men of imagination.

—ISAAC DISRAELI, *Literary Character of Men of Genius.*

> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
>
> —SHAKESPEARE, *Midsummer-Night's Dream.*

It is common, among those who deal chiefly with life's practicalities, to think of imagination as having little value in comparison with direct thinking. They smile with tolerance when Emerson says that "Science does not know its debt to the imagination," for these are the words of a speculative essayist, a philosopher, a poet. But when Napoleon—the indomitable welder of empires—declares that "The human race is governed by its imagination," the authoritative word commands their respect.

Be it remembered, the faculty of forming *mental images* is as efficient a cog as may be found in the whole mind-machine. True, it must fit into that other vital cog, pure thought, but when it does so it may be questioned which is the more productive of important results for the happiness and well-being of man. This should become more apparent as we go on.

I. WHAT IS IMAGINATION?

Let us not seek for a definition, for a score of varying ones may be found, but let us grasp this fact: By imagination we mean either the faculty or the process of forming mental images.

The subject-matter of imagination may be really existent in nature, or not at all real, or a combination of both; it may be physical or spiritual, or both—the mental image is at once the most lawless and the most law-abiding child that has ever been born of the mind.

First of all, as its name suggests, the process of imagination—for we are thinking of it now as a process rather than as a faculty—is memory at work. Therefore we must consider it primarily as

1. Reproductive Imagination

We see or hear or feel or taste or smell something and the sensation passes away. Yet we are conscious of a greater or lesser ability to reproduce such feelings at will. Two considerations, in general, will govern the vividness of the image thus evoked—the strength of the original impression, and the reproductive power of one mind as compared with another. Yet every normal person will be able to evoke images with some degree of clearness.

The fact that not all minds possess this imaging faculty in anything like equal measure will have an important bearing on the public speaker's study of this question. No man who does not feel at least some poetic impulses is likely to aspire seriously to be a poet, yet many whose imaging faculties are so dormant as to seem actually dead do aspire to be public speakers. To all such we say most earnestly: Awaken your image-making gift, for even in the most coldly logical discourse it is sure to prove of great service. It is important that you find out at once just how full and how trustworthy is your imagination, for it is capable of cultivation—as well as of abuse.

Francis Galton[1] says: "The French appear to possess the visualizing faculty in a high degree. The peculiar ability they show in pre-arranging ceremonials and fêtes of all kinds and their undoubted genius for tactics and strategy show that they are able to foresee effects with unusual clearness. Their ingenuity in all technical contrivances is an additional testimony in

the same direction, and so is their singular clearness of expression. Their phrase *figurez-vous*, or *picture to yourself*, seems to express their dominant mode of perception. Our equivalent, of 'image,' is ambiguous."

But individuals differ in this respect just as markedly as, for instance, the Dutch do from the French. And this is true not only of those who are classified by their friends as being respectively imaginative or unimaginative, but of those whose gifts or habits are not well known.

Let us take for experiment six of the best-known types of imaging and see in practise how they arise in our own minds.

By all odds the most common type is, (a) *the visual image.* Children who more readily recall things seen than things heard are called by psychologists "eyeminded," and most of us are bent in this direction. Close your eyes now and re-call—the word thus hyphenated is more suggestive—the scene around this morning's breakfast table. Possibly there was nothing striking in the situation and the image is therefore not striking. Then image any notable table scene in your experience—how vividly it stands forth, because at the time you felt the impression strongly. Just then you may not have been conscious of how strongly the scene was laying hold upon you, for often we are so intent upon what we see that we give no particular thought to the fact that it is impressing us. It may surprise you to learn how accurately you are able to image a scene when a long time has elapsed between the conscious focussing of your attention on the image and the time when you saw the original.

(b) *The auditory image* is probably the next most vivid of our recalled experiences. Here association is potent to suggest similarities. Close out all the world beside and listen to the peculiar wood-against-wood sound of the sharp thunder among rocky mountains—the crash of ball against ten-pins may suggest it. Or image (the word is imperfect, for it seems to suggest only the eye) the sound of tearing ropes when some precious weight hangs in danger. Or recall the bay of a hound almost upon you in pursuit—choose

your own sound, and see how pleasantly or terribly real it becomes when imaged in your brain.

(c) *The motor image* is a close competitor with the auditory for second place. Have you ever awakened in the night, every muscle taut and striving, to feel your self straining against the opposing foot-ball line that held like a stone-wall—or as firmly as the headboard of your-bed? Or voluntarily recall the movement of the boat when you cried inwardly, “It’s all up with me!” The perilous lurch of a train, the sudden sinking of an elevator, or the unexpected toppling of a rocking-chair may serve as further experiments.

(d) *The gustatory image* is common enough, as the idea of eating lemons will testify. Sometimes the pleasurable recollection of a delightful dinner will cause the mouth to water years afterward, or the “image” of particularly atrocious medicine will wrinkle the nose long after it made one day in boyhood wretched.

(e) *The olfactory image* is even more delicate. Some there are who are affected to illness by the memory of certain odors, while others experience the most delectable sensations by the rise of pleasing olfactory images.

(f) *The tactile image*, to name no others, is well nigh as potent. Do you shudder at the thought of velvet rubbed by short-nailed finger tips? Or were you ever “burned” by touching an ice-cold stove? Or, happier memory, can you still feel the touch of a well-loved absent hand?

Be it remembered that few of these images are present in our minds except in combination—the sight and sound of the crashing avalanche are one; so are the flash and report of the huntman’s gun that came so near “doing for us.”

Thus, imaging—especially conscious reproductive imagination—will become a valuable part of our mental processes in proportion as we direct and control it.

2. Productive Imagination

All of the foregoing examples, and doubtless also many of the experiments you yourself may originate, are merely reproductive. Pleasurable or horrific as these may be, they are far less important than the images evoked by the productive imagination—though that does not infer a separate faculty.

Recall, again for experiment, some scene whose beginning you once saw enacted on a street corner but passed by before the dénouement was ready to be disclosed. Recall it all—that far the image is reproductive. But what followed? Let your fantasy roam at pleasure—the succeeding scenes are productive, for you have more or less consciously invented the unreal on the basis of the real.

And just here the fictionist, the poet, and the public speaker will see the value of productive imagery. True, the feet of the idol you build are on the ground, but its head pierces the clouds, it is a son of both earth and heaven.

One fact it is important to note here: Imagery is a valuable mental asset in proportion as it is controlled by the higher intellectual power of pure reason. The untutored child of nature thinks largely in images and therefore attaches to them undue importance. He readily confuses the real with the unreal—to him they are of like value. But the man of training readily distinguishes the one from the other and evaluates each with some, if not with perfect, justice.

So we see that unrestrained imaging may produce a rudderless steamer, while the trained faculty is the graceful sloop, skimming the seas at her skipper’s will, her course steadied by the helm of reason and her lightsome wings catching every air of heaven.

The game of chess, the war-lord’s tactical plan, the evolution of a geometrical theorem, the devising of a great business campaign, the elimination of waste in a factory, the dénouement of a powerful drama, the overcoming of an economic obstacle, the scheme for a sublime poem, and the convincing siege of an audience may—nay, indeed must—each be

conceived in an image and wrought to reality according to the plans and specifications laid upon the trestle board by some modern imaginative Hiram. The farmer who would be content with the seed he possesses would have no harvest. Do not rest satisfied with the ability to recall images, but cultivate your creative imagination by building "what might be" upon the foundation of "what is."

II. THE USES OF IMAGING IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

By this time you will have already made some general application of these ideas to the art of the platform, but to several specific uses we must now refer.

1. Imaging in Speech-Preparation

(a) *Set the image of your audience before you while you prepare.* Disappointment may lurk here, and you cannot be forearmed for every emergency, but in the main you must meet your audience before you actually do—image its probable mood and attitude toward the occasion, the theme, and the speaker.

(b) *Conceive your speech as a whole while you are preparing its parts*, else can you not see—image—how its parts shall be fitly framed together.

(c) *Image the language you will use*, so far as written or extemporaneous speech may dictate. The habit of imaging will give you choice of varied figures of speech, for remember that an address without *fresh* comparisons is like a garden without blooms. Do not be content with the first hackneyed figure that comes flowing to your pen-point, but dream on until the striking, the unusual, yet the vividly real comparison points your thought like steel does the arrow-tip.

Note the freshness and effectiveness of the following description from the opening of O. Henry's story, "The Harbinger."

Long before the springtide is felt in the dull bosom of the yokel does the city man know that the grass-green goddess is upon her throne. He sits at his breakfast eggs and toast, begirt by stone walls, opens his morning paper and sees journalism leave vernalism at the post.

For whereas Spring's couriers were once the evidence of our finer senses, now the Associated Press does the trick.

The warble of the first robin in Hackensack, the stirring of the maple sap in Bennington, the budding of the pussy willows along the main street in Syracuse, the first chirp of the blue bird, the swan song of the blue point, the annual tornado in St. Louis, the plaint of the peach pessimist from Pompton, N. J., the regular visit of the tame wild goose with a broken leg to the pond near Bilgewater Junction, the base attempt of the Drug Trust to boost the price of quinine foiled in the House by Congressman Jinks, the first tall poplar struck by lightning and the usual stunned picknickers who had taken refuge, the first crack of the ice jamb in the Allegheny River, the finding of a violet in its mossy bed by the correspondent at Round Corners—these are the advanced signs of the burgeoning season that are wired into the wise city, while the farmer sees nothing but winter upon his dreary fields.

But these be mere externals. The true harbinger is the heart. When Strephon seeks his Chloe and Mike his Maggie, then only is Spring arrived and the newspaper report of the five foot rattler killed in Squire Pettregrew's pasture confirmed.

A hackneyed writer would probably have said that the newspaper told the city man about spring before the farmer could see any evidence of it, but that the real harbinger of spring was love and that "In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

2. Imaging in Speech-Delivery

When once the passion of speech is on you and you are "warmed up"—perhaps by striking *till* the iron is hot so that you may not fail to strike *when* it is hot—your mood will be one of vision.

Then (a) *Re-image past emotion*—of which more elsewhere. The actor re-calls the old feelings every time he renders his telling lines.

(b) *Reconstruct in image the scenes you are to describe.*

(c) *Image the objects in nature whose tone you are delineating,* so that bearing and voice and movement (gesture) will picture forth the whole convincingly. Instead of merely stating the fact that whiskey ruins homes, the temperance speaker paints a drunkard coming home to abuse his wife

and strike his children. It is much more effective than telling the truth in abstract terms. To depict the cruelness of war, do not assert the fact abstractly—"War is cruel." Show the soldier, an arm swept away by a bursting shell, lying on the battlefield pleading for water; show the children with tear-stained faces pressed against the window pane praying for their dead father to return. Avoid general and prosaic terms. Paint pictures. Evolve images for the imagination of your audience to construct into pictures of their own.

III. HOW TO ACQUIRE THE IMAGING HABIT

You remember the American statesman who asserted that "the way to resume is to resume"? The application is obvious. Beginning with the first simple analyses of this chapter, test your own qualities of image-making. One by one practise the several kinds of images; then add—even invent—others in combination, for many images come to us in complex form, like the combined noise and shoving and hot odor of a cheering crowd.

After practising on reproductive imaging, turn to the productive, beginning with the reproductive and adding productive features for the sake of cultivating invention.

Frequently, allow your originating gifts full swing by weaving complete imaginary fabrics—sights, sounds, scenes; all the fine world of fantasy lies open to the journeyings of your winged steed.

In like manner train yourself in the use of figurative language. Learn first to distinguish and then to use its varied forms. *When used with restraint,* nothing can be more effective than the trope; but once let extravagance creep in by the window, and power will flee by the door.

All in all, master your images—let not them master you.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Give original examples of each kind of reproductive imagination.

2. Build two of these into imaginary incidents for platform use, using your productive, or creative, imagination.

3. Define (*a*) phantasy; (*b*) vision; (*c*) fantastic; (*d*) phantasmagoria; (*e*) transmogrify; (*f*) recollection.

4. What is a “figure of speech”?

5. Define and give two examples of each of the following figures of speech[1]. At least one of the examples under each type would better be original. (*a*) simile; (*b*) metaphor; (*c*) metonymy; (*d*) synecdoche; (*e*) apostrophe; (*f*) vision; (*g*) personification; (*h*) hyperbole; (*i*) irony.

6. (*a*) What is an allegory? (*b*) Name one example. (*c*) How could a short allegory be used as part of a public address?

7. Write a short fable[2] for use in a speech. Follow either the ancient form (*Æsop*) or the modern (George Ade, Josephine Dodge Daskam).

8. What do you understand by “the historical present?” Illustrate how it may be used (*ONLY* occasionally) in a public address.

9. Recall some disturbance on the street, (*a*) Describe it as you would on the platform; (*b*) imagine what preceded the disturbance; (*c*) imagine what followed it; (*d*) connect the whole in a terse, dramatic narration for the platform and deliver it with careful attention to all that you have learned of the public speaker’s art.

10. Do the same with other incidents you have seen, or heard of, or read of in the newspapers.

NOTE: It is hoped that this exercise will be varied and expanded until the pupil has gained considerable mastery of imaginative narration. (See chapter on “Narration.”)

11. Experiments have proved that the majority of people think most vividly in terms of visual images. However, some think more readily in terms of auditory and motor images. It is a good plan to mix all kinds of images in the course of your address for you will doubtless have all kinds of hearers. This plan will serve to give variety and strengthen your effects by

appealing to the several senses of each hearer, as well as interesting many different auditors. For exercise, (*a*) give several original examples of compound images, and (*b*) construct brief descriptions of the scenes imagined. For example, the falling of a bridge in process of building.

12. Read the following observantly:

The strikers suffered bitter poverty last winter in New York.

Last winter a woman visiting the East Side of New York City saw another woman coming out of a tenement house wringing her hands. Upon inquiry the visitor found that a child had fainted in one of the apartments. She entered, and saw the child ill and in rags, while the father, a striker, was too poor to provide medical help. A physician was called and said the child had fainted from lack of food. The only food in the home was dried fish. The visitor provided groceries for the family and ordered the milkman to leave milk for them daily. A month later she returned. The father of the family knelt down before her, and calling her an angel said that she had saved their lives, for the milk she had provided was all the food they had had.

In the two preceding paragraphs we have substantially the same story, told twice. In the first paragraph we have a fact stated in general terms. In the second, we have an outline picture of a specific happening. Now expand this outline into a dramatic recital, drawing freely upon your imagination.

[1] *Inguiries into Human Faculty.*

[1] Consult any good rhetoric. An unabridged dictionary will also be of help

[2] For a full discussion of the form see, *The Art of Story-Writing,* by J. Berg Esenwein and Mary D. Chambers.